

Chicago - U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) called the Bush administration's implementation of the President's Great Lakes Executive Order “only a modest first step.” He called on Congress to pass bipartisan legislation to provide additional resources and better coordination to protect the Great Lakes from numerous environmental threats.

“The value of this Executive Order is that the EPA and other federal agencies will now manage the Great Lakes as a single ecosystem,” said Congressman Kirk. “Congress must now take the lead by passing a bipartisan Great Lakes Restoration Act.”

In May 2004, President Bush established a Great Lakes Interagency Task Force to look at 140 federal programs that related to the Great Lakes. The Task Force established a partnership with governors, mayors and other officials in December 2004, called the “Great Lakes Regional Collaboration of National Significance.” The Regional Collaboration group recommended new federal funding totaling \$3 billion annually to improve Great Lakes protection. The final report of the Administration's Task Force failed to endorse this bipartisan goal.

In the House, Congress is considering two bills to boost coordination and funding for Great Lakes programs: The Great Lakes Restoration Act (H.R. 792 with 63 cosponsors) by Rep. Emanuel (D-IL) and The Great Lakes Environmental Protection and Restoration Programs Reauthorization Act (H.R. 2129 with 19 cosponsors) by Rep. Ehlers (R-MI). Rep. Kirk is an original cosponsor of both bills. “I look forward to helping Chairman Ehlers and Congressman Emanuel find common ground and combine the best of both bills to enact bipartisan Great Lakes legislation,” said Kirk.

Congressman Kirk released an official list compiled by the Library of Congress Congressional Research Service showing 48 major federal programs related to the Great Lakes. Spending for all of these programs in Fiscal Year 2006 will total just over \$4 billion, with \$570 million directly focused on protecting the lakes.

Kirk also listed five other initiatives that need to be accomplished “within the year”:

1. Establish a deadline to ban dumping of untreated water into the Great Lakes.

2. Enact legislation to make Chicago’s barrier preventing entry by Asian carp into Lake Michigan permanent.
3. Complete testing of foreign ship ballast water treatment methods to prevent other invasive species from entering the Great Lakes.
4. Establish a real-time monitoring system to keep beaches safe for swimming.
5. Start an annual mercury pollution monitoring system for the Great Lakes.

The congressman highlighted the work of the Alliance for the Great Lakes and its Executive Director, Cameron Davis. “Lake Michigan and all the Great Lakes have been under environmental assault for decades,” Kirk said. “I will continue to seek guidance from groups like the Alliance for the Great Lakes and work with Mayor Daley to lead Congressional efforts to clean up polluted harbors, block invasive species and end mercury contamination. Our priorities must also include establishing a real-time monitoring system to keep beaches safe for swimming and setting a ban on dumping of untreated water into the Great Lakes.”

Contact: Matt Towson
847-940-0202
cell: 773-454-5396